YLR

The Yale Literary Review

An Undergraduate Publication

Issue 1 September 2019

The Yale Literary Review

Issue 1

September 2019

Staff

Anne Lu, Editor-in-Chief, BK 2020

Cameron Wright, Senior Editor, TD 2020

Karen Yao, Senior Editor, TD 2020

Claire Elliman, Senior Editor and Treasurer, DC 2020

Isabella Yang, Artistic Director, SY 2021

Finley Doyle, Artistic Director, PC 2020

Contributing Artist

Catherine Webb, BF 2022

Contributors

Lukas Cox

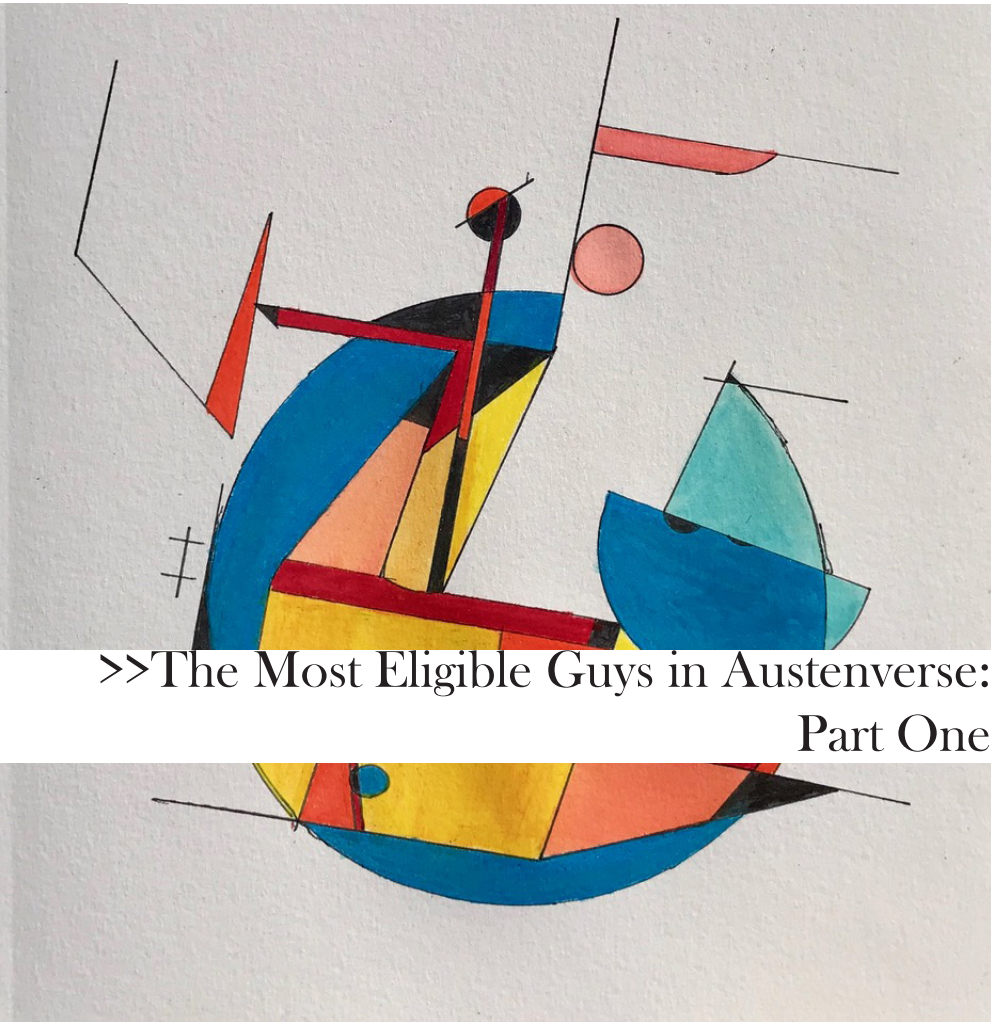
Sunny Miao

Matt Nadel

Alejandro Octavio Nodarse

/Table of Contents/

/Anne Lu/



>>The Most Eligible Guys in Austenverse: Part One

We all know Mr. Darcy, the richest, handsomest, dashing-est Austenian hero. He is so perfect, in fact, that he is single-handedly responsible for 90% of Harlequin romance heroes[1], who are basically just mutated clones.[2] He has given Jane and her fans a bad rep—just say, "I love Jane Austen," and you'll be met with eye-rolls and the dreaded label of *basic*. Alas! Shall the other beautiful Austenian heroes remain forever hidden between the pages? Absolutely not—we shall help them rise up against this oppression. This series of ~~clickbait~~ literary essays presents the objectively correct ranking of Jane Austen's men: some are better for hook-ups, others for marriage, and all of them are swoon-worthy.[3] This first installment of the Austen-verse series will present the results of the "Best for a Fling" category. Criteria for this award included physical attractiveness, exciting-ness, and fun-ness to be around. Depending what you're looking for, these guys might be just your cuppa. They are bad ideas and even worse people, but some of them would fit right in at Yale…

1 Error margin: plus ~~or minus~~ 10%

2 "Explore Romance Series." *Harlequin,* https://www.harlequin.com/shop/pages/brand-landing.html. Accessed 9 March 2019.

3 All candidates from a completed novel and who have some romantic connection to the heroines were considered.

Honorable Mentions, aka "Not Good for a Fling but Might be Entertaining Dates"

9. William Collins, ***Pride and Prejudice***

Did we say that all Austenian men are swoon-worthy? Well, you might, indeed, faint in Mr. Collins' presence, but more likely from amusement or exasperation than overwhelming attraction. I mean, just imagine receiving a marriage proposal that begins with:

> "My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced that it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly—which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness. Twice has she condescended to give me her opinion (unasked too!) on this subject; and it was but the very Saturday night before I left Hunsford—between our pools at quadrille, while Mrs. Jenkinson was arranging Miss de Bourgh's footstool, that she said…"

Mr. Collins is long-winded, obsequious, pompous, and misguided, but he's sure to leave you with a first-date-disaster story that you can keep telling for decades—though it will take him a while to realize that you really, *really* mean it when you

say you don't want to marry him.

8. John Thorpe, *Northanger Abbey*

You know it's not going to work when he says things like, "Novels are all so full of nonsense and stuff…they are the stupidest things in creation." Although he is not passionate about literature, however, John Thorpe is very passionate about other things: horses, money, and himself. A typical conversation between Catherine Morland, the (underrated!) heroine of (underrated!) *Northanger Abbey,* proceeds as follows:

> "Thorpe's ideas then all reverted to the merits of his own equipage, and she was called on to admire the spirit and freedom with which his horse moved along, and the ease which his paces, as well as the excellence of the springs, gave the motion of the carriage…It was finally settled between them without any difficulty that his equipage was altogether the most complete of its kind in England, his carriage the neatest, his horse the best goer, and himself the best coachman."

He turns out to be a gold-digger on top of his pompousness, narcissism, and tendency to exaggerate, but he would definitely be an interesting guy to meet, once.

7. Sir James Martin, *Lady Susan*

Lady Susan is an epistolary novel that traces the schemes of the title character, a seasoned flirt, charmer, manipulator, maybe even sociopath. We first encounter Sir James through Lady Susan's description of him in a letter to a friend: "Were he but one degree less contemptibly weak I certainly should [marry him]: but I must own myself rather romantic in that respect, and that riches only will not satisfy me." Lady Susan is rather flippant and unforgiving in her assessments of people, but even a kinder, more impartial observer later notes:

> "Sir James talked a great deal, and made many civil excuses to me for the liberty he had taken in coming to Churchhill—mixing more frequent laughter with his discourse than the subject required—said many things over and over again, and told Lady Susan three times that he had seen Mrs. Johnson a few evenings before."

We don't get many direct depictions of Sir James in the epistolary form, but he seems like a harmlessly insipid, slightly awkward guy who doesn't have much going on inside. Clearly, he's tolerable, entertaining, and/or rich enough to outweigh the lack of intellectual/emotional fulfillment, because Lady Susan ends up deciding to marry him, after all.

Now for the actual rankings in "Best for a Fling":

6. Philip Elton, *Emma*

As the vicar of Highbury, Mr. Elton appears respectable and relatively well-off. He is supposedly quite good-looking, and Emma describes him as "good-humored, cheerful, obliging, and gentle." Note, however, that she only thinks highly of him as a potential match for her friend, Harriet; she is much too smart to want him for herself. It turns out that, all along, Mr. Elton was interested in Emma for her money, and not the humbler Harriet. After that love triangle disintegrates, he quickly marries a nouveau-riche heiress. He certainly does not cause as much material suffering as some of Jane's more infamous fuckboys; in fact, he might even be somewhat relatable in his social-climbing, wealth-seeking ways. But there are plenty of snakes in the Yale-blue sea, so a "good-humored, cheerful, obliging, and gentle" gold-digger is nothing special here.

5. William Elliot, *Persuasion*

Mr. Elliot is a mystery from the beginning, known only

as Anne's cousin and heir presumptive to her father's baronetcy and her beloved home, Kellynch Hall. If you refuse to accept the social mores of Georgian England, then just forget they're cousins, pretend they're not related by blood, or do whatever you need to do to make it work. Mr. Elliot has been estranged from Anne's immediate family for many years, ever since he chose to marry a rich heiress over Anne's eldest sister, Elizabeth. Thus, our impression of him is unfavorable from the outset. A chance meeting between the two, however, catalyzes a key relationship in the novel:

> "He looked at her with a degree of earnest admiration, which she could not be insensible of…It was evident that the gentleman, (completely a gentleman in manner) admired her exceedingly. Captain Wentworth looked round at her instantly in a way which shewed his noticing of it. He gave her a momentary glance, a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, 'That man is struck with you.'"

Nothing much is actually said here about Mr. Elliot himself, but he produces quite an effect on Anne and her ex, Captain Wentworth. We are immediately curious about the man who helps Anne remember, for the first time in years, that she is beautiful and desired, yet without making us feel

that she *requires* his validation. When they meet officially, Mr. Elliot explains to her family that he is now a widower and the past was all a misunderstanding. He quickly wins everyone over and seems like the perfect guy to help Anne get over her ex; Mr. Elliot is handsome, witty, charismatic, set to inherit Kellynch Hall, a cold, calculating, opportunistic gold-digger who screwed over his friend and said friend's widow—wait, what? The truth comes out when Anne goes to visit an old friend, Mrs. Smith, who turns out to be the widow (obviously). Mrs. Smith reveals that Mr. Elliot only married his first wife for money; badmouthed Anne's family; led Mr. Smith into debt and, as executor to his will, left Mrs. Smith in poverty; and is pursuing Anne to ensure his inheritance of Kellynch Hall. Would you want to hookup with a guy who wants to rob you of *your* house and who screwed over your friends and family? That just seems too awkward to be worth the trouble.

4. George Wickham, *Pride and Prejudice*

Ah, George Wickham. The classic Austenian bad boy: handsome, charming, irresponsible, commitment-phobic. At first, he seems like everything the straitlaced, severe, boring

Mr. Darcy is not, which attracts our fun-loving Lizzy Bennet. It turns out that he is nothing like Mr. Darcy in other respects, either. Wickham squandered the money left him by Darcy's father, and then badmouthed Darcy for refusing him more; tried to elope with Darcy's younger sister, Georgiana, to get back at him and take her inheritance; runs away from the army because he has so many debts; and elopes with Lizzy's younger sister, Lydia, with no intention of marrying her. In terms of damage done, he is probably the worst person we have encountered so far. But if we transplant him into our modern context, he would probably be fine and actually quite agreeable for a one-night stand.

3. Frank Churchill, *Emma*

> "In spite of Emma's resolution of never marrying, there was something in the name, in the idea of Mr. Frank Churchill, which always interested her. She had frequently thought…that if she were to marry, he was the very person to suit her in age, character and condition…She had a great curiosity to see him, a decided intention of finding him pleasant, of being liked by him to a certain degree, and a sort of pleasure in the idea of their being coupled in their friends' imaginations."

Surprisingly, Frank mostly lives up to Emma's expectations. He is handsome, agreeable, well-liked by her friends and family, and has not had any terrible scandals. What's more tantalizing than fantasizing that someone could be The One and them turning out to be mostly like what you imagined? Well, it depends what the "mostly" is. In this case, the part where he falls short is actually quite important: he only flirts with Emma to cover up his secret engagement with the pretty, smart, kind, proper, elegant, talented, accomplished, but tragically circumstanced (i.e. orphaned without an inheritance), Jane Fairfax. It's already pretty annoying to be used and tossed aside in favor of the annoyingly perfect person you've envied all your life. What makes Frank even worse is that he flirts with Emma and throws gibes at Jane *right in front of Jane.* Not only does he mislead and use Emma, but he is also inconsiderate of his supposed "true love." But if you're just looking for a hookup, he could be a safe and attractive choice, depending how much you hate the Jane Fairfax in your life and how bad of a person you are.

2. Henry Crawford, *Mansfield Park*

Unlike the aforementioned gentlemen, Henry is not

handsome. But according to his sister, he is enormously popular with women:

> "I have three very particular friends who have been all dying for him in their turn; and the pains which they, their mothers (very clever women), as well as my dear aunt and myself, have taken to reason, coax, or trick him into marrying, is inconceivable! He is the most horrible flirt that can be imagined. If your Miss Bertrams do not like to have their hearts broke, let them avoid Henry."

If Miss Crawford exaggerates, it is not by much; the Miss Bertrams are, indeed, well on their way to having their hearts broken:

> "Her brother was not handsome: no, when they first saw him he was absolutely plain… The second meeting proved him not so very plain: he was plain, to be sure, but then he had so much countenance, and his teeth were so good, and he was so well made, that one soon forgot he was plain; and after a third interview, after dining in company with him…he was no longer allowed to be called so by anybody. He was, in fact, the most agreeable young man the sisters had ever known."

A man who can so effectively overcome unfavorable first impressions must be extraordinarily agreeable to be around. He's not a perfect person, of course; he shows hints

here and there of a pernicious manipulativeness that causes discord between sisters, friends, and couples, and he remains coldly non-committal to both Bertram sisters. But he causes no scandals and is never as intentionally deceptive as some of the gentlemen above. All in all, pretty solid hookup material—just make sure you see him enough times to forget that he is plain, but not enough times to have your heart broken.

Aaaaaaaand the Best Austenian Fling is…

1. John Willoughby, *Sense and Sensibility*

Yes, Willoughby abandoned his pregnant ex; yes, he left Marianne for a rich heiress. But in a world where safe and consensual hookups can happen and women aren't dependent on men for their happiness, Willoughby would be an excellent partner for a good and short time. He is the type of person who can sweep you off your feet (or onto his horse after you sprain your ankle), spout sonnets at you without seeming ridiculous, and epitomize the Romantic hero. He may also be the Austenian villain with the most interiority and evidence of change. He may seem to be repeating his foul history by abandoning Marianne, but we might almost be-

lieve that, unlike before, he has become capable of love. If he did love Marianne, then we can only imagine his pain in being forced to marry for money, and his subsequent attempt to cut himself off from Marianne's life becomes something more than just selfish callousness. Even if he's not relationship material, Willoughby can give you a whirlwind of a liaison that will leave you with endless material for your long walks in the rain and broody poetry-writing, long after he is gone.

There you have the objectively correct ranking of Austenian hookup-candidates. Vehemently disagree with something? Too bad. Just kidding—the editors would love to fight you.[4] Regardless, stay tuned for the next installments of the Yale Literary Review, where you will find rankings for "Best (Boy) Friends" and "asdfjkl;#$()Ijgajsopd! (You Wish.)"

Your Most Obliged and Affectionate Friend,
Anne Lu
Editor-in-Chief

4 Please send duel requests by Facebook, email, or carrier pigeon.

/Isabella Yang/

A Kyoto Story<<

Splendid things – Chinese brocade. Ornamental swords. Tinted Buddhist images. Long, richly coloured clusters of wisteria blossom hanging from a pine tree." Many times have I imagined Lady Sei Shōnagon's surroundings as she wrote down those words: sitting in her study facing out, a full moon above her head? By her pillow, lying sideways on tatami mats, a little flame from one sole candle illuminating every subtle twist and turn of her brush strokes? Or, perhaps, in a courtyard in late spring, as those wisteria blossoms fall right through the lush green of fresh pine trees, petals scattered on her shoulders? Those simple, fragmented phrases pierce through a thousand years' layers of dusted time, resonating in the world today all the way from ninth century Japan.

Sei Shōnagon's writing is filled with lists of birds, trees, flowers, mountains, ponds, names of poetry collections, delightful things, infuriating things, disturbing things, things of finest elegance. If she had been living in the modern day, perhaps she would own a carefully designed – and well-followed – personal blog, filled with photos, quotes and fragments of the beauty she catches in everyday life; perhaps that is why I

relate to her, because the things I read in her diary-like little book remind me of my time spent in Kyoto, observing the movement of clouds between mountains, recording changes in the dusk's colors, capturing the smells of the rainy season combined with damp wooden roofs, noting everything delightful that happens so definitely yet transiently.

The Pillow Book could only be written at the place they called Heian-kyō in Sei Shōnagon's time. Where else, in Japan or in the entire world, has three sides surrounded by mountains, one side opening up to a river, and another one flowing through the city's most intricately designed map of grids? Where else would have four seasons that each coat the city in an even more brilliant hue, and an overflowingly rich culture of words, colors and songs constantly floating in its air? Where else would women be the first ones to create long scrolls of works using a calligraphy specific to members of their own sex, the *onna-de*, the soft, slender flow of ink forming the non-Chinese *kana*, their own writing system? The first secular literatures Heian-kyō, or Kyoto as we call it, belong to the ladies: Izumi Shikibu composed tender words of longing on the trails of Kifune Shrine wrapped in green mountain

mists, Murasaki Shikibu traced with her gaze the pale figure of her Empress clad in a heavy kimono and recording it down as an epitome of beauty, and Sei Shōnagon, composed her little book of things private and precious on scrolls of pillow paper.

People often cite Sei Shōnagon's cleverness, her wittiness, her quick response that enables her to compose every life moment into a poem. But I like her in a different way. I like her the way I like reading *The Pillow Book* in bed on a rainy night, one dim lamp by my side, when the world becomes nothing but the sole connection between the word and the soul, one still moment of beauty in full tranquility. I like her because she notices and captures beauty so well: an elegant branch of blossoming plum covered in a thin layer of refined ice and snow, an endearing little white chick whose lanky legs poke out from its furry body as if poking out from a short robe, plume grass especially lovely in autumn fields. Sei Shōnagon wrote that one cannot compare summer and winter, night and day, rainy days and sunny days, old age and youth, for she sees beauty so different yet so steady in all of them. *The Pillow Book* is a piece of intimate writing, which

does not reveal any details about the author's personal life, yet speaks so intimately to the hearts of those vulnerable to beauty – beauty of all sorts, but especially the beauty present in the changing seasons and colors and intricacies of architectures' curves of the ancient city of Kyoto.

In one little section in her book of intimate words, Sei Shōnagon constructed for her readers a little intimate scene: a hot, moonlit night in the seventh month of the year, when a woman and a man briefly encounter each other after rendezvous with their lovers. They banter yet do not overstep their boundaries, leaving nothing but a fan lying on the ground before they parted in the morning mist. The scene was bold yet reserved, matches the dreadful heat on a summer night in Kyoto yet also resembles the tenderness of the city's night breezes. But most of all, this subtly balanced, reserved boldness carries a beauty in it, a loveliness that perhaps urged Sei Shōnagon, when the scene occurred to her imagination, to write it down. "In the summer, the night," she wrote in the opening paragraphs of the book, and this scene, like many other scenes recorded and unrecorded that once happened in her imagination, has remained part of this Kyoto story that

has its echo resounded on summer nights for thousands of years to come.

Reference:

Sei Shōnagon, trans. Meredith McKinney, The Pillow Book (London: Penguin Classics, 2006).

/Matt Nadel/

Trouillot's Savage Slot: The Necessity of Western Mediation<<

The early 20th century marked the dawn of the modern documentary form, which was predicated on a seemingly simple idea. Instead of portraying "staged scenes of imaginary characters and fictional stories of the studio-made pictures," the documentary would foreground reality, telling stories that deal "with real people and real events."[1] Documentaries would, in short, be the nonfiction counterpart to mainstream Hollywood narratives. Yet, after almost a century of documentary cinema, this so-called nonfiction genre has come under formidable scholarly scrutiny: Does editorial discretion undermine the objective portrayal of reality? To what extent does a filmmaker's cultural context manifest in her work? Are documentaries a reliable method of anthropology?

In his seminal essay "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness," anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot addresses these questions in the context of ethnography. Trouillot forwards the idea of the savage slot—a primitive Other through which the West "seeks a 'psychoanalytic therapeutic' from the 'modern neurosis,'

1 Jacobs, Lewis. "Precursors and prototypes (1894-1922)." *The documentary tradition* (1971): 2-9.

the frantic, unnatural nature of Western life. Trouillot argues that modern anthropology—and, by extension, documentary film—engages in the work of relegating certain populations to this savage slot, conforming them to Rosseau's storied "noble savage" ideal.[2] Close analysis of two documentary films, however, reveals critical nuance within Trouillot's theory. Specifically, the films *Nanook of the North* and *Grizzly Man* demonstrate that Western exploitation of the savage slot requires a readily available retreat into Western comfort. In other words, the phenomenon of savage utopia, and its accompanying exoticization of the primitive, rely on a mediating force that separates the Westerner from the fullness of the savage world for which he purportedly longs. This paper will first review the historical framework that gave rise to the savage slot's implication of an available Western escape; it will then discuss how *Nanook of the North* visually relegates the Inuit to the savage slot and how *Grizzly Man* reinforces the need for mediated, not unfettered, exposure to savagery.

Trouillot traces the roots of the savage slot to the

2 Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. "Anthropology and the savage slot: The poetics and politics of otherness." In *Global Transformations*, pp. 22-26. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003.

beginnings of European colonialism in the New World. Columbus' happenstance encounter with the Caribbean in 1492 marked "the first material step in a continuously renewed process" of molding America into "its still unpolished alter ego, its elsewhere, its other." Along with increased exploration of the New World came paraethnographic reports, travelers accounts that purported to describe an alternative state of nature in the New World. Indeed, in fewer than 25 years after Columbus' fateful error,

> "the year 1516 saw the publication of two anthropological precursors: the Alcalá edition of the *Decades* of Pietro Martire d'Anghiera (a paraethnographic account of the Antilles, and in many ways one of Europe's earliest introductions to a 'state of nature' elsewhere) and one more popular edition of Amerigo Vespucci's epistolary travel accounts."[3]

These supposedly nonfictional reports of lands outside the newly consolidating West were, however, riddled with myth. Some travelers accounts featured "reports of unicorns and floating isles," while others used nonetheless-false "'realist' pictures of the savage, pictures that would pass twentieth-century tests of accuracy." It is not a coincidence that these travelers accounts were published at the same time as some of

3 Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. "Anthropology and the savage slot: The poetics and politics of otherness." pp. 22-26.

the first fictional utopic narratives, including Thomas More's "account of an 'ideal state' on the island of *Utopia*, the prototypical nowhere of European imagination." This simultaneity, along with its accompanying blend of the real and imagined, demonstrates that these accounts served the need for "psychoanalytic therapy"—a repreieve from Western neurosis—more than any desire for factual understanding:

> "Outside of a restricted group of overzealous scholars and administrators, it mattered little to the larger European audience whether such works were fictitious or not. That they presented an elsewhere was enough. That the elsewhere was actually somewhere was a matter for a few specialists."

The object of the West's craving was not a corpus of translated Amerindian oral histories or folk tales, but a Western-mediated, external evaluation of the voiceless savage.

In light of the self-serving purpose of the West's New World ethnography, including its devaluation of truth, the purported definition of documentary film as nonfiction prompts dissonance. Indeed, the roots of documentary form come into conflict with Lewis Jacobs' theorization of its precondition: the treatment of reality not "as background, but

[as] the very subject of these films."[4] No work makes this conflict quite as clear as *Nanook of the North,* Robert Flaherty's revolutionary 1922 silent documentary about an Inuit man named Nanook and his family. Through his directorial and editorial discretion, Flaherty sets his subjects squarely within the savage slot, placing their most "exotic" behaviors on display. In the film, Nanook and his family travel by canoe, rarely engage in verbal communication, and hunt (including in one particularly dramatic and bloody battle with a seal). Nanook's most significant challenges are posed not by the inconveniences of the West, but by his environment, the blistering cold of the sparsely inhabited, proverbial North. He responds to these challenges with primitivism—by building a glorious igloo and securing his domesticated wolves outside for the night. By declaring in the title cards that Nanook lives among the "most cheerful people—the fearless, lovable, happy-go-lucky Eskimio… utterly dependent upon animal life," Flaherty diminishes the humanity of the Inuit community, instead portraying it as the monolithic object of Western imagination. They travel to the "'big igloo,'" as if they have

4 Jacobs, Lewis. "Precursors and prototypes (1894-1922)." *The documentary tradition* (1971): 5.

no conception of the difference between an igloo and a trading post, where modern technology confuses them. In fact, when presented with a gramophone record, the gleeful Nanook attempts to eat it.

Scholarship on *Nanook of the North,* along with the 1990 follow-up documentary *Nanook Revisited,* elucidates a fact that the 1922 film omits: It is largely fictional. Most prominently, the name Nanook was invented by Flaherty, conjured up to replace the protagonist's more complex, non-Western name, Allakariallak. Nanook's wife, called Nyla in the film, is not Allakariallak's wife, but Flaherty's; her name is Alice. The clownlike sequence in which Nanook battles a seal under a frozen lake in an epic tug of war was also concocted; members of Flaherty's crew were on the other side of the rope, simulating an antiquated hunting practice that the Inuit had not used since gaining access to guns years earlier. Perhaps most surprisingly, Nanook and his peers possessed quite a bit of technical savvy; in fact, the film's credit sequence

> "obscures the engagement with the cinematic process by *Allakariallak and others who worked on the production of Flaherty's film in various ways as technicians*, camera operators, film developers, and production

consultants (emphasis added)."[5]

Nanook's comedic interaction with the gramophone and his knife-only hunting methods are more than slightly exaggerated; they are fully performed. Nanook's behavior in the film was in fact so invented and anachronistic, so absurd by local standards, that when *Nanook of the North* was screened to an Inuit audience during the production of *Nanook Revisited,* the crowd burst into laughter.[6]

Yet, the Western public adored the film, largely ignoring the growing corpus of evidence that *Nanook of the North* was fictionalized. Rather than being ridiculed, the film "was instantly hailed by every critic in New York… a substantial if not a sensational box-office success."[7] The film fulfills the West's need for "psychoanalytic therapy"—not despite its lack of indigenous authorship, but precisely because of it. The film's Western mediation—its portrayal of the Inuit as distant and ultimately unthreatening to the audience's Western

5 Ginsburg, Faye. "Screen memories: resignifying the traditional in indigenous media." *Media worlds: Anthropology on new terrain* (2002): 39.

6 *Nanook Revisited*. Directed by Joe Massot. United States. DVD. 1990.

7 Sherwood, Robert. "Robert Flaherty's nanook of the north." *The documentary tradition* (1979): 19.

lifestyle—enables the audience to safely, nostalgically harken back to the focus on subsistence that once characterized human life. Flaherty, with the authority to write title cards, stage scenes, and sequence footage, participates complicity in "a history of unequal 'looking relations,'" characterized by the "deliberate erasure of indigenous ethnographic subjects as actual or potential participants in their own screen representations."[8]

Perhaps, one might posit, it is not that Western authorship enables the utopic idealization of savage life, but that few popular alternatives exist. However, Werner Herzog's 2005 documentary *Grizzly Man* disproves this contention, demonstrating that it is indeed distance from the savage that enables the Westerner to experience the therapeutic respite he craves. *Grizzly Man* follows Timothy Treadwell, an eccentric American man who spent 13 summers living among the flora and fauna of an Alaskan wildlife reserve—namely, among its grizzly bears. The dominant mood evoked by the film is absurdity. The film is centered around hours of footage that Treadwell captured himself—most of which consist of

8 Ginsburg, Faye. "Screen memories": 39-40.

Treadwell monologuing to his camcorder. In his didactic, self-aggrandizing homilies, Treadwell paints himself as the lone cowboy, a protector of the precious, tragically misunderstood grizzly bear population. He anthropomorphizes the bears (and foxes), giving them names and personalities, engaging lovingly with them, even petting them. He becomes emotional at the thought of grizzly bears' bad reputation. He even chases down a mischievous fox who stole his hat.

Herzog's filmmaking style compounds both Treadwell's oddness and the film's general mood of absurdity. Herzog includes long moments of silence after Treadwell's monologues, leaving the audience with an image of Treadwell peering into the wild distance, or occasionally right into the camera. Herzog even includes clips of Treadwell performing multiple takes of the same soundbite. Herzog's interviews with other players in Treadwell's story, including his friends and the coroner who investigated his dead body, maintain a performative quality; they are extensions of Treadwell himself. His friends are emotional, even emphatic about the authenticity and valor that Treadwell exhibited. One friend cries while Herzog, sitting in front of her on camera, listens to the

audio recording of Treadwell being killed by a bear. He tells her, as dramatically as Treadwell would, never to listen to the tape and to destroy it. Moreover, the camera's relationship with the coroner is almost erratic, framing him in shots so close up as to produce a fisheye effect and lighting him with dramatic hues—the caricature of a mad scientist.

Despite Treadwell's absurdity, the audience hesitates to laugh at him; his sincerity represents a failure to see the irony in his own life. As Kimberly Davis explains, "irony rests on the principle of inclusion and exclusion… and that gives irony its edge."[9] Although the West fetishizes a harkening back to bygone days of primitivism, none of us would actually abandon Western sensibilities to recreate them; Treadwell fails to access this irony, placing himself in the *excluded* group and stepping too far into the savage slot himself. Flaherty, in his production of *Nanook of the North*, purports to be undertaking an adventure similar to Treadwell's: "a long series of explorations in the north… done in journeys lasting months at a time with only two or three Eskimos as my companions."[10]

9 Davis, Kimberly Chabot. "White Filmmakers and Minority Subjects: Cinema Vérité and the Politics of Irony in" Hoop Dreams" and" Paris Is Burning"." *South Atlantic Review*(1999): 26.

10 *Nanook of the North*. Directed by Robert Joseph Flaherty. United

However, Flaherty—and audiences of *Nanook of the North*—have title cards, creative framing, and editorial discretion to buffer their exposure to the savage. Treadwell does not. He is not nostalgic; he is crazy—because he refuses to respect a cultural boundary that most nonfiction cinema claims to transcend: the boundary between *us* and *them*.

Some may claim that the difference between the reception of *Nanook of the North* and of Treadwell in *Grizzly Man* arises not from the presence of a Western buffer, but from inherent differences between film and face-to-face contact. To refute this claim, however, one needs to look no further than Dennis O'Rourke's 1988 documentary *Cannibal Tours*. Although this paper does not engage in a deep analysis of *Cannibal Tours,* it does seek to position the film as *Grizzly Man*'s counterpart. The white tourists in this film are distinct from Treadwell. They do not attempt to submerge themselves in the indigenous Papa New Guinean culture to which they are exposed. Instead, they engage in "a futile search for utopian meaning, which is their tourist experience."[11] Audiences

States: Revillon Frères, 1922. Film.

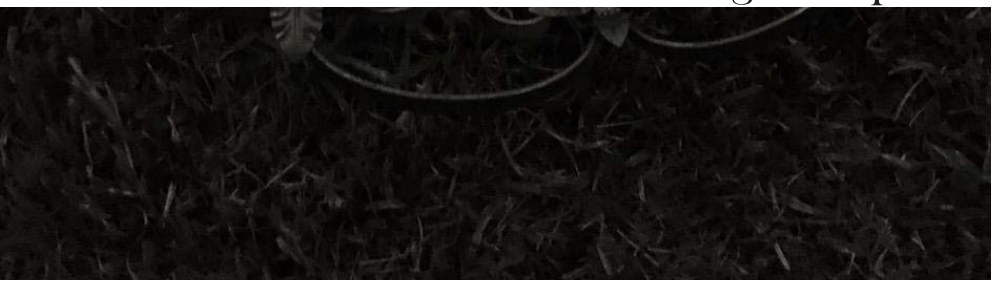
11 O'Rourke, Dennis. "On the making of Cannibal Tours" (1999): 2004.

do not pity these tourists or find them strange. Their experience, unlike Treadwell's, is mediated by economic barriers that cause indigenous vendors to wonder how tourists get so much disposable money; by a degree of maintained physical space that separates tourists from natives, even when they take a photo together; and by the tourist's knowledge that she will ultimately return to her boat. Audiences witness these tourists experience the kind of savage utopia Treadwell never does: In the final scene, with the protection of their boat, a Mozart soundtrack, and their Western sensibilities, the tourists paint their faces, dance wildly, and act out the savagery they have witnessed.

The modern documentary form reflects the West's craving for a distant, savage utopia. Yet, a close analysis of the films *Nanook of the North* and *Grizzly Man,* in light of Trouillot's theorization of the savage slot, demonstrates that exploitation of the savage requires mediation and distance—reassurance that, as the Westerner takes his well-deserved, therapeutic respite, the bustle of modernity remains, unaffected and awaiting him.

/Alejandro Octavio Nodarse/

>>Reflections on *Revelation*, or swallowing metaphors



The *Apocalypse of Saint John* appears rife with material metaphors.[1] John's vision is experienced and communicated in these terms. One is struck by the physicality of his objects of description. Take Christ's appearance in the introductory passage: "[He emerges with] feet like unto fine brass, as in a burning furnace..." (1.15). John gives an image of familiar facture, melting metal. Similarly, a heavenly throne manifests in clear terms, constructed, like God, in a series of visually accessible elements: "He that sat, was to the sight like the jasper and the sardine stone; and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald" (4.3). "And in the sight of the throne was, as it were, a sea of glass like to crystal..." (4.6). Brass, jasper, carnelian (John's *sardius*, or "sardine stone"), emerald, crystal—such divine images depend upon earthly referents. Jasper and carnelian are chosen with symbolic intention: they are the first and last stones of Jerusalem's foundation, and thus mirror the introductory framing of Christ as beginning and end, alpha and omega.[2] Alphabet and lapidary intersect.

---

1 I refer throughout to *The Apocalypse of St John (Revelation)* in the Douay-Rheims Bible (drbo.org).

2 John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 104.

John's imagistic text treats the Word itself as a starting point for analogy and anagogy. This procedure of visionary writing and ascent falls under self-referential scrutiny throughout. A literary topos of subjective inscriptions ("I looked," "I beheld," "I saw") professes the visionary's singularity. Doubt develops. John is both author and visionary. Reception and reproduction is unequivocally conflated. (One could consider the importance of the second voice of witness or amanuensis in later medieval contexts, such as Hildegard's Jutta, Volmar, and Richardis von Stade, as a "response" to the doubt surrounding an individual who claimed divine connection). John, the island-bound exile, lacks such an audience. Crucially then, John's *inability* to write proffers the reader's understanding of the prophet as beholden to the Word.[3] The text's silences become its paradoxical verification.

Interestingly, the moment of *noli ea scribere* follows the first and second woes. Humankind is killed in droves. The seven thunders speak, yet John *may not* write: "Seal up the things which the seven thunders have spoken; and write them not" (10.4). Is the woe too great? Pain distorts. Perhaps, here,

3 Richard K. Emmerson, "Visualizing the Visionary," in *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art & History,* ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 161.

it marks the limitation of text (one the image rarely heeds). The visionary has access to an aural understanding which cannot be made textual, and thus we cannot share in it. The Word articulates a failure of circumscription, in which the reader might locate their own. The *failure* of text might also prompt speculation. What has been whispered? What does John silently picture? Just as St. Jerome notes that "all praise is inadequate: many meanings are hidden in a single word,"[4] one might view the inadequacy (in literary terms) of *silence* as a site where meaning proliferates, albeit inaccessibly. The wax of Martianus Capella's *Ad Herennium*, as described by Yates and Lewis, is conceived as a liminal space between image and text: "and the remembrance of things is held by images as though they were letters," we read.[5] Mnemonic images function *as text.* The metaphor of the wax, the seal, is readily tied to John's manipulation of them as physical substantiations of his writing. More profound still is the conflation of text and image which subsists in Martianus's description. Where text

4 Suzanne Lewis, "The English Gothic illuminated Apocalypse, lectio divina, and the art of memory," *Word & Image* 7, 1 (1991), 3.

5 Martianus Capella, *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, ed. Adolfus Dick (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1925). Quoted in Lewis, 15; excerpted and translated in Francis Yates, *The Art Of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 64.

fails, the image continues. Where text is (intentionally) absent, the image expands.

The co-incidence of this moment in the speechless, pained body is amplified by the following event: John's eating of the book itself. Visionary consumption is made the object of John's metaphor. The reception is sweet, like honey on the tastebuds. But swallowing the pages produces "bile." Might we view this bitterness as a return to the body, to exilic reality (as depicted in the *Escorial Revelations*)? John's vision is one of bitternesses, of decay. "Thrust in thy sickle, and reap, because the hour is come to reap: for the harvest of the earth is ripe..." (14.15). The image of the martyr, those "who die in the Lord," emerges before this harvest (14.13). We read of ripe grapes and picture bloody bodies in a similar moment of transubstantiation. The mind of the visionary is similarly fertile; receptive, in the Aristotelian sense; the most impressionable, like Martianus's wax. The martyr's access to vision affords a similar state of grace. The martyr is literally their own "witness" (from the Greek, *mártus*), and the reception of grace is essentially singular. Until the Revelation of which John speaks, this reception can only occur *apart* from collec-

tive experience. If John is not a martyr in the traditional sense, he is, as a singular visionary, a witness *par excellence*. His consumption of the book enacts a procedure of revelation: where the Word is (painfully) embodied and digested. Like silence, his consumption becomes another opportunity for expression: a moment in which the Word exceeds its linguistic capacity and requires bodily action.

A textual framework departs from the Word to approach the Book and Body. Thomas Aquinas's notion of the image "cleaving with affection," as raised in Lewis's essay,[6] lays an (anachronistic) base from which to consider the rupture of metaphor into one's lived experience: the object (the body) cleaving with the image (the metaphor). How might the metaphorical image enter into the everyday? Does the poetic circumscription of the earthly referent effect that which is referred to—as in the case of John himself, the author who swallows his text? And could the structure of *Revelation* – and John's response to it – suggest or prefigure such an affect, not only through the body but through those earthly referents which surround it?

6 Lewis, 18.

/Sunny Miao/

>>Modernity and Its Discontent

People in modernity are haunted by radical skepticism and the collapse of meaning. Earlier values such as chivalry in pursuit of higher causes can no longer satisfy the skeptical minds of modern men, who question the certainty and foundation of those lofty principles. As a result, new values have emerged, rooted in the physicality of this world and focused on capital, utility, and practicality. *Don Quixote* can be viewed as the first novel in the time of modernity since it accurately captures the proliferation of ideas after the death of God and the ideological struggles faced by every modern individuals who have to take a stance on the conflict between idealism and realism.

A good representation of the modern struggle in *Don Quixote* is in Chapter 21, the famous episode of the helmet of Mambrino. Due to his delusion, Don Quixote mistakes a basin worn on the head by an approaching barber for the helmet of Mambrino, a legendary helmet that can allegedly make its wearer invincible. Don Quixote claims ownership of the helmet and, to obtain it, charges towards the barber. After the barber flees, Don Quixote gets his helmet but refuses to take the donkey that the barber leaves behind. Sancho Panza, how-

ever, happily swaps his inferior donkey for the barber's. Don Quixote then tries to make sense of why the helmet cannot fit his head properly and why it looks like a barber's basin. Afterwards, Don Quixote and Sancho discuss how to continue their adventure and the chapter concludes with Don Quixote's lengthy narration of his predetermined fate to become a glorious knight and king.

Here, old and modern values are represented, respectively, in Don Quixote's and Sancho Panza's opposing views of the barber's basin and donkey and their differing descriptions of the future. Don Quixote's and Sancho's differing behavior throughout this episode represent the sharp contrast between two opposing sets of values according to which Sancho and Don Quixote each direct their actions. Sancho, a practical man living in the external, material reality, holds a practical and realistic worldview, demonstrated by his first comment when he sees the helmet: "By God, this is a good basin and must be worth eight *reales* if it's worth a *maravedi*" (154). Sancho views everything based on its utility to himself and its contribution to his physical well-being; he follows no principles loftier than simply what brings the most material

benefit. Therefore, Sancho has no qualms swapping his donkey with the barber's, simply reasoning that he is in dire need of a better donkey which can "[show] him off to great advantage" (157).

Don Quixote, on the other hand, believes in "higher principles" that transcend mere utility. Don Quixote, unlike Sancho, does not direct his actions according to what materially benefits him most. Thus, even after the barber abandons his donkey and will not come back for it, Don Quixote refuses to take it, reasoning that it is against the "knightly custom" (156). Even when Don Quixote tries to take away the barber's basin, which he mistakes to be the mythic helmet of Mambrino, his action is not driven by desire for practical gain. As Don Quixote charges towards the barber, he cries: "Defend yourself, base creature, or hand over to me of your own free will what is so rightly mine" (154). For Don Quixote, the reason to take over the helmet is not merely its practical value. Rather, he believes that chivalric law entitles him to it as a knight errant, whereas the barber's base nature denies him that privilege. Unlike Sancho, Don Quixote believes that the world has a higher purpose than to maximize utility and

physical enjoyment—namely, to achieve honor and attain knightly virtues—and hence he lets the idealistic principle of chivalry govern his actions.

These two different action principles underlie how each character expects to live out his life, as demonstrated in Sancho's and Don Quixote's respective accounts of their futures. Because Sancho pursues nothing but personal benefit and practical gain, his life is not centered on any long-term objectives other than to maximize pleasure and minimize pain: "I plan to use all my five senses to keep from being wounded or wounding anybody else" (155). From this statement alone, one senses that Sancho's life is aimless and almost purely reactional. There is no ultimate goal for him to pursue, and he does not actively direct his actions towards any specific end, other than to keep himself from "being wounded." Life for Sancho consists of discrete decisions made at each separate moment based on practical calculations, with no coherent narratives to unite each action, or moment, or to endow them with meaning as steps towards a purposeful end.

On the other hand, Don Quixote dwells in an idealistic world operating under chivalric principles. This world has a

narrative, a predetermined purpose that is nobler than simple utility and that makes every seemingly arbitrary action an intentional step towards this all-important end. Towards the conclusion of Chapter 21, Cervantes allows Don Quixote four entire pages to give a detailed narration of what his future looks like: he will first win fame as a knight errant; then help a noble king fight against his enemies; win the love of the king's daughter, a virtuous princess; and, finally, marry her against all odds. For Don Quixote, his life follows a plot that is progressing towards the predetermined end, the chivalric ideal. Even though there might be uncertainties and detours along the way—represented by the occasions when Don Quixote lets his horse, Rocinante, decide which road to take—the seemingly arbitrary detours are not meaningless. Don Quixote believes there is a "wise man who writes [...] history" and, according to the plot, everything is necessary to achieve the ultimate goal; the uncertainties happen under a meaningful narrative arc. Such a belief explains why, unlike Sancho, Don Quixote embraces each moment with cheerfulness and optimism, even if it involves extreme pain and suffering—Don Quixote knows that he suffers for a reason. In fact, Don

Quixote simply forgets and disregards his extreme physical suffering— "a lame foot, a cracked rib a broken skull" (156)—because he has a goal that, to him, is higher than his physical well-being. Pain and suffering, according to the plot of chivalry, are necessary for him to reach the goal that is bound to be achieved eventually.

At first glance, Sancho's and Don Quixote's values seem irreconcilable, since they diverge on the most fundamental question: "What is the meaning of life?" Sancho's realism does not recognize any worth in Don Quixote's higher pursuits, which to Sancho are frivolous concepts with no practical utility—simply "fulling hammers that end up hammering and bettering our sense" (153). Sancho deplores the bodily pain that one has to endure on the way to pursue those worthless goals: "[the pain] won't fall away from my memory any more than they'll fade from my back" (156). For Sancho, Don Quixote's higher goal is too abstruse and abstract, while the pain he feels is real and is the only thing that matters.

Just as Sancho rejects Don Quixote's idealism, Don Quixote deeply disapproves of Sancho's exclusive focus on practicality. Don Quixote thinks that physical pain and suf-

fering are "merely a jest and a diversion" and Sancho is too distracted by such "trifles" to focus on the "noble and generous bosoms" (156). For Don Quixote, the enchanted helmet is, in fact, a representation of the noble values of the past that are murdered by modernity and reduced to mere utility. He explains, "This famous piece of the enchanted helmet [...] must have fallen into the hands of one who could not recognize or estimate its value [...] he must have melted down one half to take advantage of its high price and from the other half he made this, which resembles a barber's basin" (155). Here Don Quixote is not only trying to explain why the helmet looks like a barber's basin, but also accusing, on behalf of the bygone past, modern people like Sancho for forgetting the importance of higher principles, abandoning the idealistic narrative that endows all actions with meaning, and replacing those values with calculations of capital and utility.

However, the rapport between Sancho and Don Quixote softens the animosity between the two value systems and challenges the depiction of the two as an absolute dichotomy. In many parts of the book, the idealistic Don Quixote yields to Sancho's realistic proposal. In Chapter 23, Don Quixote frees

the galley slaves because he thinks they are punished against their own will but only receives an ungrateful beating. Don Quixote later admits that Sancho was correct earlier in trying to dissuade him from doing so: "If I had believed what you told me, I should have avoided the grief" (173). Similarly, as the journey goes on, Sancho grows to care more about abstract principles such as justice and chivalry, and even urges Don Quixote to continue his idealistic adventure in pursuit of his higher values: "What I can say is that if my master would take my advice, we'd already be out in those fields righting wrongs and undoing injustices" (482). The friendship suggests that despite their apparent opposition, there can be sympathy and even a potential synthesis between Don Quixote's idealism and Sancho's realism.

Idealism and realism—the opposition and synthesis of these two value systems are the exact ideological situation that modern individuals find themselves thrown into. The radical skepticism in modernity takes away all the guidelines regarding how one should live one's life. What theory one subscribes to almost does not matter philosophically, since, after the collapse of foundations and the destruction of *a*

priori meanings in modernity, all values are viewed as equal, and the only task of people is to choose, on their own, what theory they prefer, let it be realism, idealism, or some combination of both. The absolute neutrality among values and the imperative to choose are expressed through the final fate of the barber's basin, the true identity of which—enchanted helmet or ordinary basin—is up to the opinions and votes of the crowd. Indeed, Don Fernando states, "It is up to us [here we can insert the names of us, the readers] to decide the case" (392). By letting the audience vote on whether the object is a basin or a helmet, Cervantes implies that which principle of actions one should follow is simply a matter of consensus, what the majority chooses to believe. It does not matter what they choose but that they choose, and the options available to modern individuals regarding the ideological clash is symbolized by the crowd's reaction to the helmet. The voting scene further shows that this choice does not have to be between an absolute dichotomy between realism and idealism, since the reflections people have after the vote imply compatibility and options that lie between the two extremes: "I suppose there's some mysterious reason why you claim something so

contrary to what truth and experience show us" (393). As the friendship between Don Quixote and Sancho shows us, one can have sympathy towards both values and potentially live according to some kind of synthesis of them.

The modern struggle *Don Quixote* tries to depict is well reflected even today. Jean-Paul Sartre, a modern existentialist thinker claims that "Life has no meaning *a priori*… It is up to you to give it a meaning, and value is nothing but the meaning that you choose." *Don Quixote* exhibits an encyclopedic ambition to depict all the different values and ways of living from an almost neutral perspective. In Chapter 21, a simple object, viewed as either a barber's basin or an enchanted helmet, is endowed with the power to represent the crisis of meaning and the various ideological positions that one can take in the age of modernity. In the end, each reader is put under the spotlight and asked to reflect for oneself: "What do you believe in?" and "What is the meaning of your life?"

Works Cited:

De, Cervantes Saavedra Miguel, et al. *Don Quixote*. Ecco, 2005.

/Lukas Cox/

Local/Global: Narrative Framing and Cinematic Technique in *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* <<

The international trailer for Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* (2007) is a case study in deceptive editing. Recut with English subtitles and glowing reviews from American media outlets, Mungiu's quiet film appears to be a fast-paced, commercially viable political thriller, complete with a haunting operatic soundtrack and title cards painting its context in broad strokes: "living under total repression before the fall of Communism…two best friends have 24 hours to make the ultimate choice." Of course, in the most rudimentary sense, this last characterization of the film is accurate: its two protagonists' harrowing search for an illicit abortion takes place under the often brutal neo-Stalinist regime of Romanian President Nicolae Ceauşescu. And yet, the vague global spectacle implied by such phrases as "total repression," "the ultimate choice," and the all-encompassing "Communism" marks an ironically egregious affront to a film which is in reality defined by a steadfast commitment to the historical and personal *specificity* of the story it tells. Indeed, if *4 Months* appeals to a global audience — as its success at Cannes and considerable performance at the international box office suggest — this is not because its narrative in particular

is easily digestible or somehow universally resonant. Rather, the film achieves its "global" appeal through a masterful control of *cinematic technique*. Mungiu and cinematographer Oleg Mutu allow a sincere and deeply empathetic glance into the subjectivity of their protagonist with a series of careful camera and editing decisions. A close examination of the film's historical context and a formal reading of three pivotal scenes will illuminate the mechanisms by which *4 Months* so successfully accomplishes this elusive synthesis of "local" and "global."

In order to understand the extent to which Mungiu's film is concretely embedded in its historical milieu, we must first contextualize its treatment of abortion. The first title of *4 Months* specifies a time and place: "Romania, 1987." This information is critically important: it situates the story of Otilia and Găbiţa in the year of the Braşov Rebellion, a time of widespread discontent with the Ceauşescu government, just two years before its violent deposition in the streets of Bucharest. Along with stifling austerity measures which instigated skyrocketing levels of unemployment and malnutrition, Ceauşescu embarked on a program of social engineering

guided by a hardline pronatalist ideology.[1] Seeking a drastic increase in the nation's birthrate, his administration began a stringent enforcement of Decree 770, a 1966 law banning abortion and preventing access to contraception.[2] By 1985, these conditions were coupled with the legalization of "coercive" actions – forced gynecological exams, increased surveillance of child-bearing women – which allowed for an unprecedented level of state intervention in the lives of its female citizens.[3]

It is this heavily policed and politically tumultuous environment in which Găbița seeks an abortion. We can now see why the specificities of such an environment are so crucial to the thematic concerns of Mungiu's film. As Roger Ebert notes in his 2008 review, Găbița and Otilia are not forced into the seedy underworld of cash payments, clandestine hotel reservations, and corrupt doctors because the service they request is deemed *immoral*; the film sidesteps this familiar, broadly comprehensible debate.[4] Rather, we understand that Găbița's

1 Gail Kligman, *When Abortion is Banned: The Politics of Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania, and After*. Rep no. 805-14. Berkeley: U of California, 1992. National Council for Soviet and East European Research. Web. 21 Apr. 2017, i.

2 Ibid., 10, 18.

3 Ibid., ii-iii.

4 Roger Ebert, "4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days: The Price of an Abortion," 7 Februrary 2008, RogerEbert.com.

decision renders the two women *enemies of the state*. The severe manifestations of this state-sanctioned persecution are made frighteningly clear during the two women's first meeting with Mr. Bebe in the Hotel Tineretului. There, he warns them of the legal implications of Găbița's stage of pregnancy ("it's a new offense after the fourth month. You're not done for abortion. They get you for murder! Five to ten years!") and instructs them not to seek professional help if the procedure goes wrong ("if you call an ambulance, we're already halfway to prison"). The terrifying gravity of these warnings thus relies entirely on their *local* specificity, their immediate and material relevance to the political climate in which Otilia and Găbița find themselves. One can easily imagine that a film which instead attempted to transcend these hyper-local trappings — positioning abortion as a matter of broad cultural norms, for instance, or, indeed, as an "ultimate choice" — could achieve a higher degree of emotional resonance with foreign audiences. With this decision, however, Otilia and Găbița would become moralized archetypes; their story would read as a didactic "lesson" – the film, in short, would lose its teeth as a biting political critique.

4 Months instead speaks most loudly in a resolutely *filmic* language, honing and intensifying the austere formal techniques of the Romanian New Wave to develop a naturally grounded sense of pathos and character. Three scenes in particular reveal the operative elements of this language.

The first begins around the film's thirty-minute mark when, after their first encounter, Bebe drags Otilia along on an errand (00:29:50-00:32:10). This nearly three-minute scene is, characteristically, filmed in a single shot. We open on an establishing pan of a dilapidated parking lot filled with kids playing a game of soccer. Next, we track with Bebe's car as it enters the frame. Finally, as he turns the engine off and gets out, we move inside the car to settle on a medium profile shot of Otilia as she waits.[5] Bebe's ensuing argument with an unidentified woman plays out in the deep foreground, framed by the car's passenger window. For over a minute, sound designer Cristian Tarnovetchi buffers the conversation with the ambient noise of the parking lot — until, finally, a jarring sound reminiscent of a gunshot rips through this sonic bed. On edge, Otilia flinches and quickly turns toward

5 See figures 1.1-1.4.

its source, only to realize that it was merely the sound of a soccer ball hitting the side of the car. Inconsequential as this scene may seem to the film's broader narrative trajectory, its affective implications are profound: in this brief moment of fear our sympathies are viscerally aligned with Otilia's. We flinch as she flinches, and we are relieved as she is relieved. In conjunction with the pronounced role of sound design here, the scene's cinematographic decisions also work to create this alignment. Mutu's stark juxtaposition of foreground and background allows the moment to play as an uncannily "private" interaction between character and audience; his use of an uninterrupted take maintains the "lulling" effect which the soccer ball breaks; and finally, his elision of a classic point-of-view shot after the ball's impact requires us to keep our gaze fixated on Otilia's expressive face.

If this moment serves as an introduction to the anxious unease which pervades Otilia's subjectivity, the film's oft-cited dinner scene (1:17:50-1:25:05) further amplifies our sensitivities to such tensions. After being coerced into having sex with Bebe as payment for Gădiţa's abortion, Otilia must leave her friend in critical condition while she attends

a birthday celebration for the mother of her boyfriend, Adi. By the time she enters Adi's apartment, Otilia is nervously awaiting two important signals: a phone call from Găbița, which would indicate that something has gone wrong with the procedure, and the family's champagne toast, after which point she will be allowed to excuse herself and make her way back to the hotel. Our anticipation of these two signals is painfully extended over a single, seven-minute medium shot in which Otilia sits at the head of a cluttered table, gaunt and visibly distressed as the merry guests around her tell stories and crack jokes.[6]

Once again, the emotional tenor of Otilia's constricting predicament — and our concomitant sympathy with her predicament — is communicated visually. She appears claustrophobically forced into the direct center of the frame, pressed on both sides by the uncomfortably close party guests, her green shirt popping against the reds and blues of their clothes. The use of a single prolonged shot is equally operative in this scene as in the previous example, but here it is mobilized more concretely toward the unbearable *elongation*

6 See figures 2.1-2.2.

of diegetic time. Just as Otilia is not allowed to leave the table, so too are we forced to stay with her over the course of the entire dinner, enduring as she does the guests' loud chattering and waiting impatiently for the sound of a ringing phone. And indeed, even when the phone *does* finally ring, this tension remains unrelieved: Otilia looks hopefully in the phone's direction but is unable to leave the table politely. Only when the champagne is procured from the kitchen does Mungiu finally allow the shot to break.[7] The honest rendering of such universally legible moments of pathos in this scene, however, does not entail a diminution of the scene's sociohistorical embeddedness — every one of the guests' glancing reflections on marriage, religion, and education under Ceauşescu is carefully researched and almost exhaustively precise. Mungiu's economical use of framing and blocking instead offer a compelling argument for expressing these moments in explicitly *cinematic* terms.

The film's penultimate scene (1:49:38-1:45:56), in which Otilia races through back alleys and city streets seeking a safe place to dispose of Găbiţa aborted fetus, deploys a

7 And, indeed, it will be another eleven minutes before she finally arrives at the hotel to check on Găbiţa.

divergent set of cinematic techniques. This scene appears to break all of Mungiu's carefully established aesthetic rules: in place of dialogue-heavy, symmetrically composed, single-shot vignettes, we are now jolted by a series of fast, disorienting jump cuts. Mutu's handheld camerawork is shot in high contrast and severely underexposed; Otilia often disappears completely into the shadows before re-emerging under a dim streetlamp or the flashing lights of a passing car.[8] The sound editing is equally abrasive: there are no J-cuts or L-cuts here; each new shot is directly conjoined with its jarring new audio track. Otilia's heavy breathing fills our ears. As she searches for a bus, a silhouetted man appears over her shoulder and begins to follow her. The slow-burning anxiety cultivated by the car and dinner scenes has, in other words, morphed into the recognizable trappings of a psychological horror film, complete with an immediate and deeply subjective sense of scotophobic terror.

This break from Mungiu's rigorously established formal structure in fact provides the film's most paradigmatic alignment of localized narrative and "universal" formal

8 See figures 3.1-3.4.

technique. Otilia's mission here is heartbreakingly specific: she has been instructed by Bebe to "take a bus, get off at a high rise, go to the tenth floor, and throw [the abortus] down the rubbish chute." Moreover, Mungiu has convincingly established the narrative necessity of such a dramatic method of disposal. We understand that Otilia would be unable to flush the fetus down the toilet (the drain will be blocked) and equally unable to bury it (dogs will dig it up). The imposition of the aesthetics of "horror" on this scene, then, does not serve to flatten Otilia into a stereotypical protagonist of that genre. On the contrary, her motives remain firmly rooted in the film's diegesis — and the distinctly climactic, newly harrowing constraints of this diegesis in turn call for a newly perspectival formal technique. Thus, if a conscious application of camerawork and editing asks us to be moved by the universally frightening elements of Otilia's journey (seclusion, alienation, unknown men lurking in the shadows), the film never allows us to fully extricate this fear from the particular realities of abortion in 1987 Romania.

The narrative mechanics at work in scenes such as these require a reimagining of the "world" of "world cinema."

It is clearly insufficient to appropriate the language of marketing as the basis for a critical category; if *4 Months* is to be considered a "world film," we must find a metric which moves beyond its mere existence as a non-Anglophone production with an international distribution deal. It is equally dangerous to impose on "world cinema" the prerequisite of extra-local narrative aspirations — for such an ontology runs the risk of eliding the vast complexity of international networks in favor of a complacent and naïvely totalizing brand of humanism. In the rush to find an adequately capacious definition of "world," both of these commonly cited definitions seem to lack a rigorous interrogation of the explicit mechanisms of film. It is in this light where Mungiu's film may emerge as the paradigm of a more constructive understanding of world cinema: a genre which mobilizes the universal power of cinematography and editing to disclose a series of locally specific truths. *4 Months* is not a film about "humanity," nor is it a film about "Communism." It is the story of Otilia and Găbiţa, expertly channeled through a filmmaker's eye.

/Karen Yao/

Tasting Shadows:
Language on Sex Language<<

Sex has often been described as a thrilling, even spiritual, experience - an ecstasy inducing pearly gateway to a world beyond. Although this may be a bit mystical for the more practical lover, regarding sex as a transformative experience has been fairly constant throughout cultures and time. The range of poetic examples highlighted in this essay, "Under the Linden Trees" by Walther von der Vogelweide and Cathy Park Hong's "All the Aphrodisiacs," seems proof enough of this point, as both sex and language bridge the distance between lusty lovers in 13th century Germany and Korean-American power-provocateurs in 21st Century California. Through these poems, one can develop not only an understanding of the means by which sex gains its exalted reputation but also (in my humble opinion, more compellingly) an appreciation for the beautiful contradictions in language, echoing Theodor Adorno's thoughts in his essay, "On Lyric Poetry and Society." Though there are many differences in the sexual encounters that these poems describe, both illustrate the multidimensional, paradoxical power of language, which both invites and denies access to different worlds.

Language Within the Poem

It is first relevant to observe how language works **within** the poem (before observing how this connects with language **of** the poem): this section will delineate how language is converted in the sexual context to form a new language and world that stand apart from the reality of the reader.

I. New Language: Sex Language

Language is converted into a new language in the sexual context. In Hong's poem, through the lens of everyday life, the language appears to be random, featuring "russian roulette," "ginseng," and "Household phrases" like "—*ch'i-wa (Clean up)*" (Hong 1, 2, 8, 9). However, this language must be read with a new lens - though the words may mirror the reader's 'real' language, "a different language leaks out" (4). The phrases have been "sex-ified," transformed from a set of Korean phrases into a parallel sex version, resulting in an entirely new and "different" sex language. Moving forward, this new language will be referred to as 'sex language.' The phrases, in this context, have new meanings, new uses and effects - which in and of itself - creates a world in which this new language system is the primary means of communica-

tion for its two inhabitants. The existence of this world (if the reader dislikes the use of this term existing sphere or bubble may work) hangs on the subsistence of sex language, closed off and accessed through it, that separates this world from the reader's world. In a similar fashion, in von der Vogelweide's poem, the couple excitedly "made a bed of flowers" (7) (of course, later recognizable as "broken flowers and trampled grass") and form their sex language consisting of the word, "Tandaradei." This word too has passed through a sexual filter, creating a world where the couple can use this language with new lens and understanding, apart from 'reality.' In addition to 'sex language,' terms in the remainder of this essay can include 'new world' representing the world it brings forth, and aspects relating to the reader's reality will be proceeded with the qualification 'real' (e.g. real time).

II. New World

With sex language in mind, we may begin to uncover how the new world is created which begins with the two people encapsulated in a unified soul-state that others cannot enter into or understand. There is an undeniably palpable heightened mind and emotional state in both poems.

In "Under the Linden Trees," the narrator evokes the divine to describe her "heavenly happiness" (5) that matches his "crazed" (7) ecstasy. In "All the Aphrodisiacs," the whole form of the poem, especially towards the end, evokes the feeling of a climax. The phrases begin long but become shorter which parallels a hastening toward a climax; the punctuation of many commas and hyphens mirrors the falling of a moment into the next moment before a climax; and the ending line is so visceral that it feels as if the narrator is both calming the man and the reader down, "*sssshhht*" (30). This state is a very intimate and personal unification between the couple's minds and emotions - altogether, their soul-state. Others cannot enter into this connection or fully comprehend what it means to be in that specific unified soul-state as it is accessed experientially between the two (though, indeed, the reader is invited into it. I had anticipated your objections - please hold them as I will remark on this more further on.)

The unified soul-state then provides a unique space in which language can take on new form and meaning, understood by these two people. This implies that 1. sex language is the specific product of two people and fully understood only

by those two, and that 2. it is untranslatable in another space, or world, where the language does not have this meaning. For the former observation, sex language is characteristically specific for each couple; "tandaradei"[1] and various Korean phrases would not apply to other couples in the same way. It is also personal - understood implicitly in that intimate setting; others do not, and thus, cannot, partake in the intuitive understanding. For the latter point, sex language is untranslatable. Real words [real as in 'real'] that the reader might know can be translated into sex language and take on new meaning, but this new creation cannot be translated back. It is, in a sense, unable to be defined, comprehended, or grasped - making the nature of sex language so intriguing. In "Under the Linden Trees," the word "tandaradei" is the only word that has not been translated into English in the poem. Similarly, in Hong's poem, after the climax of an orgasm, the man asks for translations though she tells him "it's a secret" (12). The man is remarking on the language of the literal phrases,

1 Some may raise objections due to the involvement of the bird in the creation of sex language. However, like the reader, while the bird knows the language and even was the inspiration for it, knowledge of and understanding of are different. The bird does not necessarily understand the sex language, as the reader will learn that true understanding comes through experience as well as knowledge.

not the sex language - any translation of real phrases will not give him insight into the way those phrases work in the new world they create through sex. Thus, sex language is untranslatable in a different context with its own hidden meanings.

III. New Time

Another aspect of this new world is its temporality - sex language is applicable only "in the heat of the moment," and using sex language recalls the immediacy of the moment with all its accompanying emotions. Firstly, it is to be understood that the new world and new language apply to the moment in which the union of soul-state reaches its peak, creating that sphere where new meaning is realized. Put in more colloquial terms, this is the point of climax during sex. To better illustrate, many often use the phrase "in the heat of the moment." Indeed, this moment, so strong and full of passion, is one that exists apart from real time - seeming to be a singular moment that may stretch on forever, infinite possibilities within the finite. In "Under the Linden Trees," the sex language in the poem, or the word, "tandaradei," appears somewhat sporadically throughout the poem. Each time, it renews the moment of first realization and understanding of

the sex language, simultaneously insinuating certain rushes of feeling. At one point, the narrator describes their scene in a more rational manner and the possibility that "if anyone came down this path, he would recognize by the roses - Tandaradei! - what we did together" (8-9). It is as if the narrator is trying to reason with herself about the social consequences, yet the roses and sex cue her back into that moment of climax where she experiences a moment of pleasure, outside of real time, before resuming her thoughts. The interruption of "tandaradei" within the sentence brings her back to a distinct world, apart from real world and its considerations. Hong's poem also shows this recall of immediacy, beginning the poem with a string of sex language phrases. She intersperses some explication between, such as "you say it turns you on when I speak Korean" (6) which falls in the middle of "the idea of throat, an orifice, a cord-" (5) and "the gold paste of afterbirth" (7). The explanation, compared to the sex language portions, seems to whisk her in and out of different worlds - one where she is presently involved in action, the next in real time and real thought, and then back again as if she is replaced within a moment marked outside of time that exists

in a world within itself.

Hong's poem further depicts the impossibility of communicating with and understanding sex language outside of its temporal context. As mentioned before, the man asks for translations "afterwards" (12). He then is not referring to translations of sex language, but of the Korean language. Set outside of the heat of the moment, the couple does not communicate with sex language the same way; it reverts back to a different meaning. While having sex, communicating with sex language "make[s] [him] climax" (11); after sex, this moment apart from real time is over, which also affects the unified soul-state that makes entrance to a different world possible. The importance of *that* moment to the understanding of sex language cannot be overemphasized.

This points to the untranslatability after the moment as well (readers will recall that sex language is untranslatable - we presently add another dimension to this). Untranslatability is due not only to its containment of space in a distinct world, but also because of its situation in a separate time in this new world. These are slightly different aspects of the untranslatability of sex language. When untranslatable due

to spatial dimensions, it relates to understanding of meaning and significance of sex language for the specific couple and how it is different from real language. It is untranslatable due to temporal conditions more-so on experiential terms. After the fact, one cannot explicate sex language as it needs to be understood inwardly in the emotion of the moment itself. Visually, if one were traveling between worlds, the former would relate to entering a new world where sex language contains its new meaning; one would not be able to pass the gate without a key (knowledge of sex language) nor communicate in this new realm without it. The latter would relate more to the ability to find this world or travel between worlds in the first place. It is not all the time that one can be in this unified soul-state in the heat of the moment to be in the right place to enter the gate. (I am not assuming that the man in Hong's poem understands what is happening, but awareness is not requisite to the process).[2]

2 It is important to address concerns that may arise: the nature of love and the importance of awareness in sex language. The process in which sex language functions does not necessarily imply or negate either. It seems in "Under the Linden Trees," there is more emphasis on love while in "All the Aphrodisiacs," something more socially twisted may be happening. Similarly, the man in Hong's poem seems very unaware of the ways in which sex language is functioning. Without love or awareness, sex language still can work the same way - a unified soul-state in a moment of time which leads to a means of communicating and understanding each other in the context of a new world. There is implicit and

Language of the Poem

Thus far, we have considered how sex language works **within** the poem, highlighting ways in which sex language opens a new world for the couple. Now, it would be helpful to reflect on the language **of** the poem - that is, how the lyric poems tries to communicate with the readers, and how in some ways, falls short...beautifully. (The reader was asked to practice the virtue of patience; thank you for the cooperation.)

I. The Incomplete Bridge of Language

The lyric poem acts as a bridge, inviting the readers into an understanding of the sex language; even so, it is an incomplete bridge, with many weak links and holes. The narrator in "Under the Linden Trees" remarks that "[she] will tell noone, noone, it will remain between [them] and the little bird — Tandaradei — who will stay quiet" (12-13). Yet, of course, in the poem, she is telling another person - the reader. Not only is she telling, she is also giving access to the new world

intuitive understanding in this - but clearly, for the rather dense man in Hong's poem, unawareness.

One may ask whether understanding of sex language is made deeper and truer by love and awareness - and if so, how that would affect the world created (perhaps, a bigger space with more complex shapes, paths, and even some colorful flora thrown in)...but that is beyond the scope of this essay.

through revealing the sex language. In Hong's poem as well, Hong displays the intensity of such a personal scene for public eyes, and she too, invites the reader to understand their sex language by explaining and demonstrating (quite vividly) how it works. Both poems work to bring the reader in, strangely aware (in the existence of the poem) and unaware (in the nature of the poem) of the contradictions that arise in doing so.

However, though readers are invited to cross this bridge, it is one with holes that the reader cannot fill; readers cannot fully enter into this new world, created by two people in an exact moment in time. Though they have knowledge of the couple's personal sex language, they do not have the experience or understanding of it. The language of the poem can only do so much to communicate the specific in universal terms. Paradoxically, the very way that the poems try to explain themselves maintains the distance - the poems use language to describe sex language so that readers will understand, but the very use and nature of sex language puts such understanding continually out of reach. We can assume and imagine what "tandaradei" means, but it will only act as a

sort of cue and still hold in it indefinable meanings not fully capture-able in language other than the unique sex language. This sex language hinges not only on knowing how the language works - as the reader can somewhat see what is happening - but also on the felt understanding, such that there exists a separation from the reader's poetic reality and the new world.

II. The Nature of Art

This strange tension of simultaneous coming together and pulling apart when language tries to communicate about language is rich - and ultimately, beautiful - art. Echoing Theodor Adorno's thoughts in his essay "On Lyric Poetry and Society," "language's chimerical yearning for the impossible becomes an expression of the subject's insatiable erotic longing" (Adorno 53). The very nature of sex language is something we cannot obtain - the impossible - and this held tension between languages is something we cannot break. This prompts narrators and readers into a state of longing to express, expressing, failing to fully express, and therefore longing to express again and again to somehow strive towards that "just out of reach" understanding. Still, Adorno aptly notes that it is:

> art only when they come to participate in something universal by virtue of the specificity they acquire in being given aesthetic form...immersion in what has taken individual form elevates the lyric poem of something universal by making something not distorted, not grasped (Adorno 38).

Readers can understand Adorno in that the very specificity of the sex language within the language of the lyric poem creates something that readers can all try to understand yet remains ungraspable, simply because we cannot make pure art to be graspable.[3]

Through these two very different poems, readers can uncover layers of the interaction between sex and language,

3 Again, beyond the scope of this essay, but still an interesting consideration to note: does the language of the poem en-world (verb) the reader with a seductive force in the same way sex language unifies the couple?
In some ways, yes, maybe. The lyric poem may create a world with an individual reader, such as me, in that I exist with the poem in my own way in that moment of time. In some ways, no; the lyric poem is also a bridge between worlds, meant to deepen broad societal understandings and break boundaries between people - across space and time.
Perhaps, worlds and language can exist on such a continuum. Sex language works with the couple within the poem; lyric language works with the poem and the reader; real language [real as in 'real'] is used with all people between people. The worlds encapsulated by each may have different domains and lie in concentric circles where sex language is a small circle within larger circles that contain the characteristics present of inner circles and add on their own dimensions. This may be too much...but we could consider, then, how the language of the present essay is tracing its own circle around the others.

and ultimately, art. Language, and a true understanding of it, can be a powerful creative force - in some ways, indefinable, without proper translation. Language is not only spoken or used at a mental or functional level; rather, it can take form as a means to understand deep experiences in ways that are otherwise inexpressible, such as sex. How language tries to convey other types of language has pitfalls, of course, but the beauty of these poems is that they try to communicate something that remains uncommunicable. The art is in the lingering taste on the tongue that wants for more - not in the dead consumption of feast.

Works Cited:

Adorno, Theodor W. "On Lyric Poetry and Society." *Notes to Literature, Volume One.* Edited by Rolf Tiedmann. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. 37-54. Print.

Hong, Cathy Park. "All the Aphrodisiacs." *Translating Mo'um.* Hanging Loose Press, 2002.

von der Vogelweide, Walter. "Under the Linden Tree." 13th C.

Interested in writing for us, or contributing a piece of art?

Contact us at yalelitreview@gmail.com and send articles and/or artworks our way! We look forward to reading and viewing your work.